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# Life of Dickens

By LESLIE STEPHEN

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# Biography of Charles Dickens

BY LESLIE STEPHEN

Charles Dickens (1812-1870), novelist, was born 7 February, 1812, at 387 Mile End Terrace, Commercial Road, Landport, Portsea. His father, John Dickens, a clerk in the navy pay office, with a salary of 80*l.* a year, was then stationed in the Portsmouth dockyard. The wife of the first Lord Houghton told Mr. Wemyss Reid that Mrs. Dickens, mother of John, was housekeeper at Crewe, and famous for her powers of story-telling (Wemyss Reid, in *Daily News*, 8 October, 1887). John Dickens had eight children by his wife Elizabeth, daughter of Charles Barrow, a lieutenant in the navy. The eldest, Fanny, was born in 1810, Charles, the second, was christened Charles John Huffman (erroneously entered Huffham in the register), but dropped the last two names. Charles Dickens remembered the little garden of the house at Portsea, though his father was recalled to London when he was only two years

old. In 1816 (probably) the family moved to Chatham. Dickens was small and sickly; he amused himself by reading and watching the games of other boys. His mother taught him his letters, and he pored over a small collection of books belonging to his father. Among them were *Tom Jones*, the *Vicar of Wakefield*, *Don Quixote*, *Gil Blas*, and especially Smollett's novels, by which he was deeply impressed. He wrote an infantine tragedy called *Misnar*, founded on the *Tales of the Genii*. James Lamert, the stepson of his mother's eldest sister, Mary (whose second husband was Dr. Lamert, an army surgeon at Chatham), had a taste for private theatricals. Lamert took Dickens to the theatre, in which the child greatly delighted. John Dickens's salary was raised to 200*l.* in 1819, and to 350*l.* in 1820, at which amount it remained until he left the service, 9 March, 1825. It was, however, made insufficient by his careless habits, and in 1821 he left his first house, 2 (now 11) Ordnance Terrace, for a smaller house, 18 St. Mary's Place, next to a Baptist chapel. Dickens was then sent to school with the minister, Mr. Giles (see Langton, *Childhood of Dickens*). In the winter of 1822-3 his

father was recalled to Somerset House, and settled in Bayham Street, Camden Town, whither his son followed in the spring. John Dickens, whose character is more or less represented by Micawber, was now in difficulties, and had to make a composition with his creditors. He was (as Dickens emphatically stated) a very affectionate father, and took a pride in his son's precocious talents. Yet at this time (according to the same statement), he was entirely forgetful of the son's claims to a decent education. In spite of the family difficulties, the eldest child, Fanny, was sent as a pupil to the Royal Academy of Music, but Charles was left to black his father's boots, look after the younger children, and do small errands. Lamert made a little theatre for the child's amusement. His mother's elder brother, Thomas Barrow, and a godfather, took notice of him occasionally. The uncle lodged in the upper floor of a house in which a bookselling business was carried on, and the proprietress lent the child some books. His literary tastes were kept alive, and he tried his hand at writing a description of the uncle's barber. His mother now made an attempt to retrieve the family fortunes by taking a house, 4 Gower

Street North, where a brass plate announced 'Mrs. Dickens's Establishment,' but failed to attract any pupils. The father was at last arrested and carried to the Marshalsea, long afterwards described in *Little Dorrit*. (Mr. Langton thinks that the prison was the King's Bench, where, as he says, there was a prisoner named Dorrett in 1824). All the books and furniture went gradually to the pawnbroker's. James Lamert had become manager of a blacking warehouse, and obtained a place for Dickens at 6s. or 7s. a week in the office at Hungerford Stairs. Dickens was treated as a mere drudge, and employed in making up parcels. He came home at night to the dismantled house in Gower Street till the family followed the father to the Marshalsea, and then lodged in Camden Town with a reduced old lady, a Mrs. Roylance, the original of Mrs. Pipchin in *Dombey and Son*. Another lodging was found for him near the prison with a family which is represented by the Garlands in his *Old Curiosity Shop*. The Dickenses were rather better off in prison than they had been previously. The maid-of-all-work who followed them from Bayham Street became the Marchioness of the *Old Curiosity Shop*.



The elder Dickens at last took the benefit of the Insolvent Debtors Act, and moved first to Mrs. Roylance's house, and then to a house in Somers Town. Dickens's amazing faculty of observation is proved by the use made in his novels of all that he now saw, especially in the prison scenes of *Pickwick* and in the earlier part of *David Copperfield*. That he suffered acutely is proved by the singular bitterness shown in his own narrative printed by Forster. He felt himself degraded by his occupation. When his sister won a prize at the Royal Academy he was deeply humiliated by the contrast of his own position, though incapable of envying her success. This was about April, 1824.

The family circumstances improved. The elder Dickens had received a legacy, which helped to clear off his debts; he had a pension, and after some time he obtained employment as reporter to the *Morning Chronicle*. About 1824 Dickens was sent to a school kept by a Mr. Jones in the Hampstead Road, and called the Wellington House Academy. His health improved. His school-fellows remembered him as a handsome lad, overflowing with animal spirits, writing stories, getting up little theat-

rical performances, and fond of harmless practical jokes, but not distinguishing himself as a scholar. After two years at this school, Dickens went to another kept by a Mr. Dawson in Henrietta Street, Brunswick Square. He then became clerk in the office of Mr. Mollo in New Square, Lincoln's Inn, and soon afterwards (from May, 1827, to November, 1828), clerk in the office of Mr. Edward Blackmore, attorney, of Gray's Inn. His salary with Mr. Blackmore rose from 13*s.* 6*d.* to 15*s.* a week. Dickens's energy had only been stimulated by the hardships through which he had passed. He was determined to force his way upwards. He endeavoured to supplement his scanty education by reading at the British Museum, and he studied shorthand writing in the fashion described in *David Copperfield*. Copperfield's youthful passion for Dora reflects a passion of the same kind in Dickens's own career, which, though hopeless, stimulated his ambition. He became remarkably expert in shorthand, and after two years' reporting in the Doctors' Commons and other courts, he entered the gallery of the House of Commons as reporter to the *True Sun*. He was spokesman for the reporters in a successful strife.



For two sessions he reported for the *Mirror of Parliament*, started by a maternal uncle, and in the session of 1835 became reporter for the *Morning Chronicle*. While still reporting at Doctors' Commons he had thoughts of becoming an actor. He made an application to George Bartley (q.v.), manager at Covent Garden, which seems to have only missed acceptance by an accident, and took great pains to practise the art. He finally abandoned this scheme on obtaining his appointment on the *Morning Chronicle* (Forster ii., 179). His powers were rapidly developed by the requirements of his occupation. He was, as he says (*Letters*, i. 438), 'the best and most rapid reporter ever known.' He had to hurry to and from country meetings, by coach and post-chaise, encountering all the adventures incident to travelling in the days before railroads, making arrangements for forwarding reports, and attracting the notice of his employers by his skill, resource, and energy. John Black (q.v.), the editor, became a warm friend and was, he says, his 'first hearty out-and-out appreciator.'

He soon began to write in the periodicals. The appearance of his first article, *A Dinner at Poplar Walk* (reprinted as *Mr. Minns*

and his Cousin), in the *Monthly Magazine* for December, 1833, filled him with exultation. Nine others followed till February, 1835. The paper in August, 1834, first bore the signature 'Boz.' It was the pet name of his youngest brother, Augustus, called 'Moses,' after the boy in the *Vicar of Wakefield*, which was corrupted into Boses and Boz. An *Evening Chronicle* as an appendix to the *Morning Chronicle*, was started in 1835 under the management of George Hogarth, formerly a friend of Scott. The *Monthly Magazine* was unable to pay for the sketches, and Dickens now offered to continue his sketches in the new venture. His offer was accepted, and his salary raised from five to seven guineas a week. In the spring of 1836 the collected papers were published as *Sketches by Boz*, with illustrations by Cruikshank, the copyright being bought for 150*l.* by a publisher named Macrone. On 2 April, 1836, Dickens married Catherine, eldest daughter of Hogarth, his colleague on the *Morning Chronicle*. He had just begun the *Pickwick Papers*. The *Sketches*, in which it is now easy to see the indications of future success, had attracted some notice in their original

form. Albany Fonblanque had warmly praised them, and publishers heard of the young writer. Messrs. Chapman & Hall, then beginning business, had published a book called *The Squib Annual* in November, 1835, with illustrations by Seymour. Seymour was anxious to produce a series of 'cockney sporting plates.' Chapman & Hall thought that it might answer to publish such a series in monthly parts accompanied by letterpress. Hall applied to Dickens, suggesting the invention of a Nimrod Club, the members of which should get into comic difficulties suitable for Seymour's illustrations. Dickens, wishing for a freer hand, and having no special knowledge of sport, substituted the less restricted scheme of the Pickwick Club, and wrote the first number, for which Seymour drew the illustrations. The first two or three numbers excited less attention than the collected *Sketches*, which had just appeared. Seymour killed himself before the appearance of the second number. Robert William Buss (q.v.) illustrated the third number. Thackeray, then an unknown youth, applied to Dickens for the post of illustrator; but Dickens finally chose Hablot Knight Browne (q.v.), who illustrated

the fourth and all the subsequent numbers, as well as many of the later novels.

The success of *Pickwick* soon became extraordinary. The binder prepared four hundred copies of the first number, and forty thousand of the fifteenth. The marked success began with the appearance of Sam Weller in the fifth number. Sam Weller is in fact the incarnation of the qualities to which the success was due. Educated like his creator in the streets of London, he is the ideal cockney. His exuberant animal spirits, humorous shrewdness, and kindliness under a mask of broad farce, made him the favourite of all cockneys in and out of London, and took the gravest readers by storm. All that Dickens had learnt in his rough initiation into life, with a power of observation unequalled in its way, was poured out with boundless vivacity and prodigality of invention. The book, beginning as farce, became admirable comedy, and has caused more hearty and harmless laughter than any book in the language. If Dickens's later works surpassed *Pickwick* in some ways, *Pickwick* shows in their highest development the qualities in which he most surpassed other writers. Sam Weller's peculiar trick of

speech has been traced with probability to Samuel Vale, a popular comic actor, who in 1822 performed Simon Spatterdash in a farce called *The Boarding House*, and gave currency to a similar phraseology. (*Notes and Queries*, 6th ser. v. 388; and *Origin of Sam Weller*, with a facsimile of a contemporary piratical imitation of *Pickwick*, 1883.)

Dickens was now a prize for which publishers might contend. In the next few years he undertook a great deal of work, with confidence natural to a buoyant temperament, encouraged by unprecedented success, and achieved new triumphs without permitting himself to fall into slovenly composition. Each new book was at least as carefully written as its predecessor. *Pickwick* appeared from April, 1836, to November, 1837. *Oliver Twist* began while *Pickwick* was still proceeding, in January, 1837, and ran till March, 1839. *Nicholas Nickleby* overlapped *Oliver Twist*, beginning in April, 1838, and ending in October, 1839. In February, 1838, Dickens went to Yorkshire to look at the schools caricatured in Dotheboys Hall. (For the original of Dotheboys Hall see *Notes and Queries*, 4th ser. vi. 245, and 5th ser. iii. 325.) A short



pause followed. Dickens had thought of a series of papers, more or less on the model of the old *Spectator*, in which there was to be a club, including the Wellers, varied essays satirical and descriptive, and occasional stories. The essays were to appear weekly, and for the whole he finally selected the title *Master Humphrey's Clock*. The plan was carried out with modifications. It appeared at once that the stories were the popular part of the series; the club and the intercalated essay disappeared, and *Master Humphrey's Clock* resolved itself into two stories, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, and *Barnaby Rudge*. During 1840 and 1841 *Oliver Twist* seems to have been at first less popular than its fellow-stories; but *Nicholas Nickleby* surpassed even *Pickwick*. Sydney Smith on reading it confessed that Dickens had 'conquered him,' though he had 'stood out as long as he could.' *Master Humphrey's Clock* began with a sale of seventy thousand copies, which declined when there was no indication of a continuous story, but afterwards revived. *The Old Curiosity Shop*, as republished, made an extraordinary success. *Barnaby Rudge* has apparently never been equally popular.



The exuberant animal spirits, and the amazing fertility in creating comic types, which made the fortune of *Pickwick*, were now combined with a more continuous story. The ridicule of Bumbledom in *Oliver Twist*, and of Yorkshire schools in *Nicholas Nickleby*, showed the power of satirical portraiture already displayed in the prison scenes of *Pickwick*. The humourist is not yet lost in the satirist, and the extravagance of the caricature is justified by its irresistible fun. Dickens was also showing the command of the pathetic which fascinated the ordinary reader. The critic is apt to complain that Dickens kills his children as if he liked it, and makes his victims attitudinise before the footlights. Yet Landor, a severe critic, thought 'Little Nell' equal to any character in fiction, and Jeffrey, the despiser of sentimentalism, declared that there had been nothing so good since Cordelia (Forster, i. 177, 226). Dickens had written with sincere feeling, and with thoughts of Mary Hogarth, his wife's sister, whose death in 1837 had profoundly affected him, and forced him to suspend the publication of *Pickwick* (no number was published in June, 1837). When we take into account the com-

mand of the horrible shown by the murder in *Oliver Twist*, and the unvarying vivacity and brilliance of style, the secret of Dickens's hold upon his readers is tolerably clear. *Barnaby Rudge* is remarkable as an attempt at the historical novel, repeated only in his *Tale of Two Cities*; but Dickens takes little pains to give genuine local colour, and appears to have regarded the eighteenth century chiefly as the reign of Jack Ketch.

Dickens's fame had attracted acquaintances, many of whom were converted by his genial qualities into fast friends. In March, 1837, he moved from the chambers in Furnival's Inn, which he had occupied for some time previous to his marriage, to 48 Doughty Street, and towards the end of 1839 he moved to a 'handsome house with a considerable garden' in Devonshire Terrace, facing York Gate, Regent's Park. He spent summer holidays at Broadstairs, always a favourite watering-place, Twickenham, and Petersham, and in the summer of 1841 made an excursion in Scotland, received the freedom of Edinburgh, and was welcomed at a public dinner where Jeffrey took the chair and his health was proposed by Christopher North. He was at this time fond

of long rides, and delighted in boyish games. His buoyant spirit and hearty good-nature made him a charming host and guest at social gatherings of all kinds except the formal. He speedily became known to most of his literary contemporaries, such as Landor (whom he visited at Bath in 1841), Talfourd, Procter, Douglas Jerrold, Harrison Ainsworth, Wilkie, and Edwin Landseer. His closest intimates were Macready, Maclise, Stanfield, and John Forster. Forster had seen him at the office of the *True Sun*, and had afterwards met him at the house of Harrison Ainsworth. They had become intimate at the time of Mary Hogarth's death, when Forster visited him, on his temporary retirement, at Hampstead. Forster, whom he afterwards chose as his biographer, was serviceable both by reading his works before publication and by helping his business arrangements.

Dickens made at starting some rash agreements. Chapman & Hall had given him 15*l.* 15*s.* a number for *Pickwick*, with additional payments dependent upon the sale. He received, Forster thinks, 2,500*l.* on the whole. He had also, with Chapman & Hall, rebought for 2,000*l.* in 1837 the copyright of the

*Sketches* sold to Macrone in 1831 for 150*l.* The success of *Pickwick* had raised the value of the book, and Macrone proposed to reissue it simultaneously with *Pickwick* and *Oliver Twist*. Dickens thought that this superabundance would be injurious to his reputation, and naturally considered Macrone to be extortionate. When, however, Macrone died, two years later, Dickens edited the *Pic-Nic Papers* (1841) for the benefit of the widow, contributing the preface and a story which was made out of his farce *The Lamp-lighter*. In November, 1837, Chapman & Hall agreed that he should have a share after five years in the copyright of *Pickwick*, on condition that he should write a similar book, for which he was to receive 3,000*l.*, besides having the whole copyright after five years. Upon the success of *Nicholas Nickleby*, written in fulfilment of this agreement, the publishers paid him an additional 1,500*l.* in consideration of a further agreement, carried out by *Master Humphrey's Clock*. Dickens was to receive 50*l.* for each weekly number, and to have half the profits; the copyright to be equally shared after five years. He had meanwhile agreed with Richard Bentley (1794-

1871) (q.v.) (22 August, 1836) to edit a new magazine from January, 1837, to which he was to supply a story; and had further agreed to write two other stories for the same publisher. *Oliver Twist* appeared in *Bentley's Miscellany* in accordance with the first agreement, and, on the conclusion of the story, he handed over the editorship to Harrison Ainsworth. In September, 1837, after some misunderstandings, it was agreed to abandon one of the novels promised to Bentley, Dickens undertaking to finish the other, *Barnaby Rudge*, by November, 1838. In June, 1840, Dickens bought the copyright of *Oliver Twist* from Bentley for 2,250*l.*, and the agreement for *Barnaby Rudge* was cancelled. Dickens then sold *Barnaby Rudge* to Chapman & Hall, receiving 3,000*l.* for the use of the copyright until six months after the publication of the last number. The close of this series of agreements freed him from conflicting and harassing responsibilities.

The weekly appearance of *Master Humphrey's Clock* had imposed a severe strain. He agreed in August, 1841, to write a new novel in the *Pickwick* form, for which he was to receive 200*l.* a month for twenty numbers, be-



sides three-fourths of the profits. He stipulated, however, in order to secure the much needed rest, that it should not begin until November, 1842. During the previous twelve months he was to receive 150*l.* a month, to be deducted from his share of the profits. When first planning *Master Humphrey's Clock* he had talked of visiting America to obtain materials for descriptive papers. The publication of *The Old Curiosity Shop* had brought him a letter from Washington Irving; his fame had spread beyond the Atlantic, and he resolved to spend part of the interval before his next book in the United States. He had a severe illness in the autumn of 1841; he had to undergo a surgical operation, and was saddened by the sudden death of his wife's brother and mother.

He sailed from Liverpool 4 January, 1842. He reached Boston on 21 January, 1842, and travelled by New York and Philadelphia to Washington and Richmond. Returning to Baltimore, he started for the West, and went by Pittsburg, and Cincinnati, to St. Louis. He returned to Cincinnati, and by the end of April was at the falls of Niagara. He spent a month in Canada, performing in some



private theatricals at Montreal, and sailed for England about the end of May. The Americans received him with an enthusiasm which was at times overpowering, but which was soon mixed with less agreeable feelings. Dickens had come prepared to advocate international copyright, though he emphatically denied, in answer to an article by James Spedding in the *Edinburgh Review* for January, 1843, that he had gone as a 'missionary' in that cause. His speeches on this subject met with little response, and the general opinion was in favour of continuing to steal. As a staunch abolitionist he was shocked by the sight of slavery, and disgusted by the general desire in the free States to suppress any discussion of the dangerous topic. To the average Englishman the problem seemed a simple question of elementary morality. Dickens's judgment of America was in fact that of the average Englishman, whose radicalism increased his disappointment at the obvious weaknesses of the republic. He differed from ordinary observers only in the decisiveness of his utterances and in the astonishing vivacity of his impressions. The Americans were still provincial enough to fancy that the first impressions of a young

novelist were really of importance. Their serious faults and the superficial roughness of the half-settled districts thoroughly disgusted him; and though he strove hard to do justice to their good qualities, it is clear that he returned disillusioned and heartily disliking the country. The feeling is still shown in his antipathy to the Northern States during the war (*Letters*, ii. 203, 204). In the *American Notes*, published in October, 1842, he wrote under constraint upon some topics, but gave careful accounts of the excellent institutions which are the terror of the ordinary tourist in America. Four large editions were sold by the end of the year, and the book produced a good deal of resentment. When Macready visited America in the autumn of 1843, Dickens refused to accompany him to Liverpool, thinking that the actor would be injured by any indications of friendship with the author of the *Notes* and of *Martin Chuzzlewit*.

The first of the twenty monthly numbers of this novel appeared in January, 1843. The book shows Dickens at his highest power. Whether it has done much to enforce its intended moral, that selfishness is a bad thing, may be doubted. But the humour and the

tragic power are undeniable. Pecksniff and Mrs. Gamp at once became recognised types of character, and the American scenes, revealing Dickens's real impressions, are perhaps the most surprising proof of his unequalled power of seizing characteristics at a glance. Yet for some reason the sale was comparatively small, never exceeding twenty-three thousand copies, as against the seventy thousand of *Master Humphrey's Clock*.

After Dickens's return to England, his sister-in-law, Miss Georgina Hogarth, became, as she remained till his death, an inmate of his household. He made an excursion to Cornwall in the autumn of 1842 with Maclise, Stansfield, and Forster, in the highest spirits, 'choking and gasping, and bursting the buckle off the back of his stock (with laughter) all the way.' He spent his summers chiefly at Broadstairs, and took a leading part in many social gatherings and dinners to his friends. He showed also a lively interest in benevolent enterprises, especially in ragged schools. In this and similar work he was often associated with Miss Coutts, afterwards Baroness Burdett-Coutts, and in later years he gave much time to the management of a house for fallen

women established by her in Shepherd's Bush. He was always ready to throw himself heartily into any philanthropical movement, and rather slow to see any possibility of honest objection. His impatience of certain difficulties about the ragged schools raised by clergymen of the Established Church led him for a year or two to join the congregation of a Unitarian minister, Mr. Edward Tagart. For the rest of his life his sympathies, we are told, were chiefly with the Church of England, as the least sectarian of religious bodies, and he seems to have held that every Dissenting minister was a Stiggins. It is curious that the favourite author of the middle classes should have been so hostile to their favourite form of belief.

The relatively small sale of *Chuzzlewit* led to difficulties with his publishers. The *Christmas Carol*, which appeared at Christmas, 1843, was the first of five similar books which have been enormously popular, as none of his books give a more explicit statement of what he held to be the true gospel of the century. He was, however, greatly disappointed with the commercial results. Fifteen thousand copies were sold, and brought him only 726*l.*, a result apparently due to the too costly form in

which they were published. Dickens expressed a dissatisfaction, which resulted in a breach with Messrs. Chapman & Hall and an agreement with Messrs. Bradbury & Evans, who were to advance 2,800*l.* and have a fourth share of all his writings for the next eight years. Dickens's irritation under these worries stimulated his characteristic restlessness. He had many claims to satisfy. His family was rapidly increasing; his fifth child was born at the beginning of 1844. Demands from more distant relations were also frequent, and though he received what, for an author, was a very large income, he thought that he had worked chiefly for the enrichment of others. He also felt the desire to obtain wider experience natural to one who had been drawing so freely upon his intellectual resources. He resolved, therefore, to economise and refresh his mind in Italy.

Before starting he presided, in February, 1844, at the meetings of the Mechanics' Institution in Liverpool and the Polytechnic in Birmingham. He wrote some radical articles in the *Morning Chronicle*. After the usual farewell dinner at Greenwich, where J. M. W. Turner attended and Lord Normanby took the



chair, he started for Italy, reaching Marseilles 14 July, 1844. On 16 July he settled in a villa at Albaro, a suburb of Genoa, and set to work learning Italian. He afterwards moved to the Peschiere Palace in Genoa. There, though missing his long night walks in London streets, he wrote the *Chimes*, and came back to London to read it to his friends. He started 6 November, travelled through northern Italy, and reached London at the end of the month. He read the *Chimes* at Forster's house to Carlyle, Stanfield, Maclise, Lemon, Blanchard, Douglas Jerrold, Fox, Harness, and Dyce. He then returned to Genoa. In the middle of January he started with his wife on a journey to Rome, Naples, and Florence. He returned to Genoa for two months and then crossed to St. Gothard, and returned to England at the end of June, 1845. On coming home he took up a scheme for a private theatrical performance, which had been started on the night of reading the *Chimes*. He threw himself into this with his usual vigour. Jonson's *Every Man in his Humour* was performed on 21 September at Fanny Kemble's theatre in Dean Street. Dickens took the part of Bobadil, Forster appearing as Kitely, Jerrold as Master Stephen,



and Leach as Master Matthew. The play succeeded to admiration, and a public performance was afterwards given for a charity. Dickens is said by Forster to have been a very vivid and versatile rather than a finished actor, but an inimitable manager.

His contributions to the *Morning Chronicle* seem to have suggested his next undertaking, the only one in which he can be said to have decidedly failed. He became first editor of the *Daily News*, the first number of which appeared 21 January, 1846. He had not the necessary qualifications for the function of editor of a political organ. On 9 February he resigned his post, to which Forster succeeded for a time. He continued to contribute for about three months longer, publishing a series of letters descriptive of his Italian journeys. His most remarkable contribution was a series of letters on capital punishment. (For the fullest account of his editorship, see Ward, pp. 68-74.) He then gave up the connection, resolving to pass the next twelve months in Switzerland, and there to write another book on the old model. He left England on 31 May, having previously made a rather singular overture to government

for an appointment to the paid magistracy of London, and having also taken a share in starting the General Theatrical Fund. He reached Lausanne 11 June, 1846, and took a house called Rosemont. Here he enjoyed the scenery and surrounded himself with a circle of friends, some of whom became his intimates through life. He specially liked the Swiss people. He now began *Dombey*, and worked at it vigorously, though feeling occasionally his oddly characteristic craving for streets. The absence of streets 'worried' him 'in a most singular manner,' and he was harassed by having on hand both *Dombey* and his next Christman book, *The Battle of Life*. For a partial remedy of the first evil he made a short stay at Geneva at the end of September. *The Battle of Life* was at last completed, and he was cheered by the success of the first numbers of *Dombey*. In November he started for Paris, where he stayed for three months. He made a visit to London in December, when he arranged for a cheap issue of his writings, which began in the following year. He was finally brought back to England by an illness of his eldest son, then at King's College School. His house in Devonshire Ter-

race was still let to a tenant, and he did not return there until September, 1847. *Dombey and Son* had a brilliant success. The first five numbers, with the death, truly or falsely pathetic, of Paul Dombey, were among his most striking pieces of work, and the book has had great popularity, though it afterwards took him into the kind of social satire in which he was always least successful. For the first half-year he received nearly 3,000*l.*, and henceforth his pecuniary affairs were prosperous and savings began. He found time during its completion for gratifying on a large scale his passion for theatrical performances. In 1847 a scheme was started for the benefit of Leigh Hunt. Dickens became manager of a company which performed Jonson's comedy at Manchester and Liverpool in July, 1847, and added four hundred guineas to the benefit fund. In 1848 it was proposed to buy Shakespeare's house at Stratford-on-Avon and to endow a curatorship to be held by Sheridan Knowles. Though this part of the scheme dropped, the projected performances were given for Knowles's benefit. *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, in which Dickens played Shallow, Lemon Falstaff, and Forster Master Ford,

was performed at Manchester, Liverpool, Edinburgh, Birmingham, and Glasgow, the gross profits from nine nights being 2,551*l.* In November, 1850, *Every Man in his Humour* was again performed at Knebworth, Lord Lytton's house. The scheme for a 'Guild of Literature and Art' was suggested at Knebworth. In aid of the funds, a comedy by Lytton, *Not So Bad As We Seem*, and a farce by Dickens and Lemon, *Mr. Nightingale's Diary*, were performed at the Duke of Devonshire's house in London (27 May, 1851), when the Queen and Prince Consort were present. Similar performances took place during 1851 and 1852 at various towns, ending with Manchester and Liverpool. A dinner, with Lytton in the chair, at Manchester had a great success, and the guild was supposed to be effectually started. It ultimately broke down, though Dickens and Bulwer Lytton were enthusiastic supporters. During this period Dickens had been exceedingly active. The *Haunted Man or Ghostly Bargain*, the idea of which had occurred to him at Lausanne, was now written and published with great success at Christmas, 1848. He then began *David Copperfield*, in many respects the most satis-

factory of his novels, and especially remarkable for the autobiographical element, which is conspicuous in so many successful fictions. It contains less of the purely farcical or of the satirical caricature than most of his novels, and shows his literary genius mellowed by age without loss of spontaneous vigour. It appeared monthly from May, 1849, to November, 1850. The sale did not exceed twenty-five thousand copies; but the book made its mark. He was now accepted by the largest class of readers as the undoubted leader among English novelists. While it was proceeding he finally gave shape to a plan long contemplated for a weekly journal. It was announced at the close of 1849, when Mr. W. H. Wills was selected as sub-editor, and continued to work with him until compelled to retire by ill-health in 1868. After many difficulties, the felicitous name, *Household Words*, was at last selected, and the first number appeared 30 March, 1849, with the beginning of a story by Mrs. Gaskell. During the rest of his life Dickens gave much of his energy to this journal and its successor, *All the Year Round*. He gathered many contributors, several of whom became intimate friends. He spared no pains in his editorial



duty; he frequently amended his contributors' work and occasionally inserted passages of his own. He was singularly quick and generous in recognising and encouraging talent in hitherto unknown writers. Many of the best of his minor essays appeared in its pages. Dickens's new relation to his readers helped to extend the extraordinary popularity which continued to increase during his life. On the other hand, the excessive strain which it involved soon began to tell seriously upon his strength. In 1848 he had been much grieved by the loss of his elder sister, Fanny. On 31 March, 1851, his father, for whom in 1839 he had taken a house in Exeter, died at Malvern. Dickens, after attending his father's death, returned to town and took the chair at the dinner of the General Theatrical Fund 14 April, 1851. After his speech he was told of the sudden death of his infant daughter, Dora Annie (born 16 August, 1850). Dickens left Devonshire Terrace soon afterwards, and moved into Tavistock House, Tavistock Square. Here in November, 1851, he began *Bleak House*, which was published from March, 1852, to September, 1853. It was followed by *Hard Times*, which appeared in *Household Words*,



between 1 April and 12 August, 1854; and by *Little Dorrit*, which appeared in monthly numbers from January, 1856, to June, 1857. Forster thinks that the first evidence of excessive strain appeared during the composition of *Bleak House*. 'The spring,' says Dickens, 'does not seem to fly back again directly, as it always did when I put my own work aside and had nothing else to do.' The old buoyancy of spirit is decreasing; the humour is often forced and the mannerism, more strongly marked; the satire against the court of chancery, the utilitarians, and the 'circumlocution office' is not relieved by the irresistible fun of the former caricatures, nor strengthened by additional insight. It is superficial without being good-humoured. Dickens never wrote carelessly; he threw his whole energy into every task which he undertook; and the undeniable vigour of his books, the infallible instinct with which he gauged the taste of his readers, not less than his established reputation, gave him an increasing popularity. The sale of *Bleak House* exceeded thirty thousand; *Hard Times* doubled the circulation of *Household Words*; and *Little Dorrit*, 'beat even *Bleak House* out of the field.'

Thirty-five thousand copies of the second number were sold. *Bleak House* contained sketches of Landor as Lawrence Boythorn, and of Leigh Hunt as Harold Skimpole. Dickens defended himself for the very unpleasant caricature of Hunt in *All the Year Round*, after Hunt's death. While Hunt was still living, Dickens had tried to console him by explaining away the likeness as confined to the flattering part; but it is impossible to deny that he gave serious ground for offence. During this period Dickens was showing signs of increasing restlessness. He sought relief from his labours on *Bleak House* by spending three months at Dover in the autumn of 1852. In the beginning of 1853 he received a testimonial at Birmingham, and undertook in return to give a public reading at Christmas on behalf of the New Midland Institute. He read two of his Christmas books and made a great success. He was induced, after some hesitation, to repeat the experiment several times in the next few years. The summer of 1853 was spent at Boulogne, and in the autumn he made a two months' tour through Switzerland and Italy, with Mr. Wilkie Collins and Augustus Egg. In 1854 and 1856 he

again spent summers at Boulogne, gaining materials for some very pleasant descriptions; and from November, 1855, to May, 1856, he was at Paris, working at *Little Dorrit*. During 1855 he found time to take part in some political agitations.

In March, 1856, Dickens bought Gadshill Place. When a boy at Rochester he had conceived a childish aspiration to become its owner. On hearing that it was for sale in 1855, he began negotiations for its purchase. He bought it with a view to occasional occupation, intending to let it in the intervals; but he became attached to it, spent much money on improving it, and finally in 1860 sold Tavistock House and made it his permanent abode. He continued to improve it till the end of his life.

In the winter of 1856-7 Dickens amused himself with private theatricals at Tavistock House, and after the death of Douglas Jerrold (6 June, 1857), got up a series of performances for the benefit of his friend's family, one of which was Mr. Wilkie Collins's *Frozen Deep*, also performed at Tavistock House. For the same purpose he read the *Christmas Carol* at St. Martin's Hall (30 June, 1857),

with a success which led him to carry out a plan already conceived, of giving public readings on his own account. He afterwards made an excursion with Mr. Wilkie Collins in the north of England, partly described in *A Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices*.

A growing restlessness and a craving for any form of distraction were connected with domestic unhappiness. In the beginning of 1858 he was preparing his public readings. Some of his friends objected, but he decided to undertake them, partly, it would seem, from the desire to be fully occupied. He gave a reading, 15 April, 1858, for the benefit of the Children's Hospital in Great Ormond Street, in which he was keenly interested, and on 29 April gave the first public reading for his own benefit. This was immediately followed by the separation from his wife. The eldest son lived with the mother, while the rest of the children remained with Dickens. Carlyle, mentioning the newspaper reports upon this subject to Emerson, says: 'Fact of separation, I believe, is true, but all the rest is mere lies and nonsense. No crime and no misdemeanour specifiable on either side; unhappy together, these two, good many years past, and they at length

end it' (*Carlyle and Emerson Correspondence*, ii. 269). Dickens chose to publish a statement himself in *Household Words*, 12 June, 1858. He entrusted another and far more indiscreet letter to Mr. Arthur Smith, who now became the agent for his public readings, which was to be shown, if necessary, in his defence. It was published without his consent in the New York *Tribune*. The impropriety of both proceedings needs no comment. But nothing has been made public which would justify any statement as to the merits of the question. Dickens's publication in *Household Words*, and their refusal to publish the same account in *Punch*, led to a quarrel with his publishers, which ended in his giving up the paper. He began an exactly similar paper, called *All the Year Round* (first number 30 April, 1859), and returned to his old publishers, Messrs. Chapman & Hall. Dickens seems to have thought that some public statement was made necessary by the quasi-public character which he now assumed. From this time his readings became an important part of his work. They formed four series, given in 1858-9, in 1861-3, in 1866-7, and 1868-70. They finally killed him, and it is impossible



not to regret that he should have spent so much energy in an enterprise not worthy of his best powers. He began with sixteen nights at St. Martin's Hall, from 29 April to 22 July, 1858. A provincial tour of eighty-seven readings followed, including Ireland and Scotland. He gave a series of readings in London in the beginning of 1859, and made a provincial tour in October following. He was everywhere received with enthusiasm; he cleared 300*l.* a week before reaching Scotland, and in Scotland made 500*l.* a week. The readings were from the Christmas books, *Pickwick*, *Dombey*, *Chuzzlewit*, and the Christmas numbers of *Household Words*. The Christmas numbers in his periodicals, and especially in *All the Year Round*, had a larger circulation than any of his writings, those in *All the Year Round* reaching three hundred thousand copies. Some of his most charming papers appeared, as the *Uncommercial Traveller*, in the last periodical. For his short story, *Hunted Down*, first printed in the *New York Ledger*, afterwards in *All the Year Round*, he received 1000*l.* This and a similar sum, paid for the *Holiday Romance* and *George Silverman's Explanation* in a child's magazine published by Mr. Fields, and

in the *Atlantic Monthly*, are mentioned by Forster as payments unequalled in the history of literature.

In March, 1861, he began a second series of readings in London, and after waiting to finish *Great Expectations*, in *All the Year Round*, he made another tour in the autumn and winter. He read again in St. James' Hall in the spring of 1862, and gave some readings at Paris in January, 1863. The success was enormous, and he had an offer of 10,000*l.*, 'afterwards raised,' for a visit to Australia. He hesitated for a time, but the plan was finally abandoned, and America, which had been suggested, was closed by the Civil War. For a time he returned to writing. The *Tale of Two Cities* had appeared in *All the Year Round* during his first series of readings (April to November, 1859). *Great Expectations* appeared in the same journal from December, 1860, to August, 1861, during part of the second series. He now set to work upon *Our Mutual Friend*, which came out in monthly numbers from May, 1864, to November, 1865. It succeeded with the public; over thirty thousand copies of the first number were sold at starting, and, though there was a drop in the sale of the second num-

ber, this circulation was much exceeded. The gloomy river scenes in this and in *Great Expectations* show Dickens's full power, but both stories are too plainly marked by flagging invention and spirits. Forster publishes extracts from a book of memoranda kept from 1855 to 1865, in which Dickens first began to preserve notes for future work. He seems to have felt that he could no longer rely upon spontaneous suggestions of the moment.

His mother died in September, 1863, and his son Walter, for whom Miss Coutts had obtained a cadetship in the 26th Native Infantry, died at Calcutta on 31 December following. He began a third series of readings under ominous symptoms. In February, 1865, he had a severe illness. He ever afterwards suffered from a lameness in his left foot, which gave him great pain and puzzled his physicians. On 9 June, 1865, he was in a terrible railway accident at Staplehurst. The carriage in which he travelled left the line, but did not, with others, fall over the viaduct. The shock to his nerves was great and permanent, and he exerted himself excessively to help the sufferers. The accident is vividly described in his *Letters* (ii. 229-33). In spite of these injuries he never

spared himself; after sleepless nights he walked distances too great for his strength, and he now undertook a series of readings which involved greater labour than the previous series. He was anxious to make a provision for his large family, and, probably conscious that his strength would not long be equal to such performances, he resolved, as Forster says, to make the most money possible in the shortest time without regard to labour. Dickens was keenly affected by the sympathy of his audience, and the visible testimony to his extraordinary popularity and to his singular dramatic power was no doubt a powerful attraction to a man who was certainly not without vanity, and who had been a popular idol almost from boyhood.

After finishing *Our Mutual Friend*, he accepted (in February, 1866) an offer, from Messrs. Chappell of Bond Street, of 50*l.* a night for a series of thirty readings. The arrangements made it necessary that the hours not actually spent at the reading-desk or in bed should be chiefly passed in long railway journeys. He began in March and ended in June, 1866. In August he made a new agreement for forty nights at 60*l.* a night, or 2500*l.*

for forty-two nights. These readings took place between January and May, 1867. The success of the readings again surpassed all precedent, and brought many invitations from America. Objections made by W. H. Wills and Forster were overruled. Dickens said that he must go at once if he went at all, to avoid clashing with the Presidential election of 1868. He thought that by going he could realise 'a sufficient fortune.' He 'did not want money,' but the 'likelihood of making a very great addition to his capital in half a year' was an 'immense consideration.' In July Mr. Dolby sailed to America as his agent. An inflammation of the foot, followed by erysipelas, gave a warning which was not heeded. On 1 October, 1867, he telegraphed his acceptance of the engagement, and after a great farewell banquet at Freemasons' Hall (2 November), at which Lord Lytton presided, he sailed for Boston, 9 November, 1867, landing on the 19th.

Americans had lost some of their provincial sensibility, and were only anxious to show that old resentments were forgotten. Dickens first read in Boston on 2 December; thence he went to New York; he read afterwards at Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington, again at Phila-



delphia, Syracuse, Rochester, Buffalo, Springfield, Portland, New Bedford, and finally at Boston and New York again. He received a public dinner at New York (18 April), and reached England in the first week of May, 1868. He made nearly 20,000*l.* in America, but at a heavy cost in health. He was constantly on the verge of a breakdown. He naturally complimented Americans, not only for their generous hospitality, but for the many social improvements since his previous visits, though politically he saw little to admire. He promised that no future editions of his *Notes* or *Chuzzlewit* should be issued without a mention of the improvements which had taken place in America, or in his state of mind. As a kind of thank-offering, he had a copy of the *Old Curiosity Shop* printed in raised letters, and presented it to an American asylum for the blind.

Unfortunately Dickens was induced upon his return to give a final series of readings in England. He was to receive 8000*l.* for a hundred readings. They began in October, 1868. Dickens had preferred as a novelty a reading of the murder in *Oliver Twist*. He had thought of this as early as 1863, but it was 'so horrible'

that he was then 'afraid to try it in public' (*Letters*, ii. 200). The performance was regarded by Forster as in itself 'illegitimate,' and Forster's protest led to a 'painful correspondence.' In any case, it involved an excitement and a degree of physical labour which told severely upon his declining strength. He was to give weekly readings in London alternately with readings in the country. In February, 1869, he was forced to suspend his work under medical advice. After a few days' rest he began again in spite of remonstrances from his friends and family. At last he broke down at Preston. On 23 April Sir Thomas Watson held a consultation with Mr. Beard, and found that he had been 'on the brink' of an attack of paralysis of his left side, and possibly of apoplexy, due to overwork, worry, and excitement. He was ordered to give up his readings, though after some improvement Sir Thomas consented to twelve readings without railway travelling, which Dickens was anxious to give as some compensation to Messrs. Chappell for their disappointment. In the same autumn he began *Edwin Drood*. He was to receive 7500*l.* for twenty-five thousand copies, and fifty thousand were sold during his life. It 'very, very

far outstripped every one of its predecessors' (J. T. Fields, p. 246). He passed the year at Gadshill, leaving it occasionally to attend a few meetings, and working at his book. His last readings were given at St. James's Hall, from January to March. On 1 March he took a final leave of his hearers in a few graceful words. In April appeared the first number of *Edwin Drood*. In the same month he appeared for the last time in public, taking the chair at the Newsvendors' dinner, and replying for 'Literature' at the dinner of the Royal Academy (30 April), when he spoke feelingly of the death of his old friend Maclise. He was at work upon his novel at Gadshill in June, and showed unusual fatigue. On 8 June he was working in the chalet which had been presented to him in 1859 by Fechter, and put up as a study in his garden. He came into the house about six o'clock, and, after a few words to his sister-in-law, fell to the ground. There was an effusion on the brain; he never spoke again, and died at ten minutes past six on 9 June, 1870. He was buried with all possible simplicity in Westminster Abbey, 14 June following.

Dickens had ten children by his wife:

Charles, born 1837; Mary, born 1838; Kate, born 1839, afterwards married to Charles Allston Collins, and now Mrs. Perugini; Walter Landor, born 1841, died 12 December, 1863 (see above); Francis Jeffrey, born 1843; Alfred Tennyson, born 1845, settled in Australia; Sydney Smith Haldemand, born 1847; in the navy, buried at sea 2 May, 1867; Henry Fielding, born 1849; Dora Annie, born 1850, died 14 April, 1851; and Edward Bulwer Lytton, born 1852, settled in Australia.

Dickens's appearance is familiar by innumerable photographs. Among portraits may be mentioned (1) by Maclise in 1839 (engraved as frontispiece to *Nicholas Nickleby*), original in possession of Sir Alfred Jodrell of Bayfield, Norfolk; (2) pencil drawing by Maclise in 1842 (with his wife and sister); (3) oil-painting by E. M. Ward in 1854 (in possession of Mrs. Ward); (4) oil-painting by Ary Scheffer in 1856 (in National Portrait Gallery); (5) oil-painting by W. P. Frith in 1859 (in Forster collection at South Kensington). Dickens was frequently compared in later life to a bronzed sea captain. In early portraits he has a dandified appearance, and was always a little over-dressed. He possessed

a wiry frame, implying enormous nervous energy rather than muscular strength, and was most active in his habits, though not really robust. He seems to have overtaxed his strength by his passion for walking. All who knew him, from Carlyle downwards, speak of his many fine qualities, his generosity, sincerity, and kindliness. He was intensely fond of his children (see Mrs. Dickens's interesting account in *Cornhill Magazine*, January, 1880); he loved dogs, and had a fancy for keeping large and eventually savage mastiffs and St. Bernards; and he was kind even to contributors. His weaknesses are sufficiently obvious, and are reflected in his writings. If literary fame could be safely measured by popularity with the half-educated, Dickens must claim the highest position among English novelists. It is said, apparently on authority (Mr. Mowbray Morris in *Fortnightly Review* for December, 1882) that 4,239,000 volumes of his works had been sold in England in the twelve years after his death. The criticism of more severe critics chiefly consists in the assertion that his merits are such as suit the half-educated. They admit his fun to be irresistible; his pathos, they say, though it shows bound-



less vivacity, implies little real depth or tenderness of feeling; and his amazing powers of observation were out of proportion to his powers of reflection. The social and political views which he constantly inculcates imply a deliberate preference of spontaneous instinct to genuine reasoned conviction; his style is clear, vigorous, and often felicitous, but mannered and more forcible than delicate; he writes too clearly for readers who cannot take a joke till it has been well hammered into their heads; his vivid perception of external oddities passes into something like hallucination, and in his later books the constant strain to produce effects only legitimate when spontaneous becomes painful. His books are therefore inimitable caricatures of contemporary humours, rather than the masterpieces of a great observer of human nature.





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